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PECULIARITIES OF PASTEL PAINTING.

BY JAMES HENRY MOSER.

One is so often asked about pastel. It is far from a new method, but the process seems to be not generally understood. Pastel pictures are always placed under glass to prevent dust from settling upon them, which could not be removed without taking the picture with it, for a pastel picture is really a picture in color dust.

The writer remembers vividly of facing in a studio fifteen years ago a negro boy who stood with a feather duster in one hand and a canvas in the other on which was the pale ghost of a man, all that was left of a then recently finished and accepted portrait of a gentleman. The boy explained how he "done made de fi' and swep' out, and was jes a dustin' de pitchers," but the explanation was not needed. There are some situations that tell all in one short, comprehensive glance. While pastels are fragile and may not be handled as roughly as oil, when protected by glass, as they always should be, they are the most nearly indestructible and unchangeable picture known.

Pastel paintings, literally speaking, are pictures made with colored chalks applied thickly and with that same body which belongs to pictures painted in oil or water color, guasche. The canvas or paper upon which pastels may be made is barely rough in texture or the canvas is so prepared as to resemble very fine sandpaper. The latter surface is generally used. The colors are dry, and before being prepared for the artist are identical in all three mediums—oil, water color, and pastel. For the painter of oil pictures they are ground in linseed or poppy oil. For the water color painter they are ground in water with the addition of honey and gum arabic. These mediums in the oil and water color serve to make the colors adhere to the surface of the canvas. For pastel work the colors are ground in water like the guasche, which is water color as the

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theatrical scene painter uses it, and not the tinted water which barely stains the paper and is used to make the easel picture so popular to-day. "A water color" has come to mean that kind of a paper picture. Pastels are ground, as the guasche, in water with just enough of the adhesive substance added to make the grade of pastel desired—soft, half hard, and hard.

The hard pastels are used only in the finishing, where fine, sharp touches are desired. The half hard is the more generally useful of the three. The soft are used for broad masses of color in background and drapery—those large masses which a painter in oil puts in with a large brush.

The pastel colors, after being ground and mixed into an infinite variety of shades, are molded into cylindrical sticks very much like the ordinary white school crayon, but smaller and uniform in size from end to end. These crayons when dry are packed in rows upon cotton in boxes ready for the artist's use. While the "hard" may be handled as freely as the school crayon without breaking, some varieties of the "soft" are so soft that they cannot be removed from the box without falling to pieces, and in consequence are very troublesome to handle.

In working with either oil or water color, in an hour or a little longer the color becomes dry and refuses to blend and produce certain desirable effects, compelling an entirely different treatment from that of the beginning when the work was fresh. Herein lies the superiority of pastel as a medium. The picture may be days, weeks, or even months in the course of its making, and yet the colors blend and act entirely as they did at the beginning. The stroke of a crayon looks a hundred years later as it did the moment the artist hand placed it there. Guasche is next as to holding its original look and quality, but even in that the color dried has a very different look from that it had when first applied to the canvas, the difference of the color wet and dry.

Oil sinks in, and must be varnished to bring it out, and then, as the

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years roll by, the oil turns to amber tones, producing a golden glory in color and tone of which doubtless the artist never dreamed. Perhaps if he could see his picture in its ripening age he might admit, though reluctantly, that time was the most faithful of his friends.

A friend of mine, a great traveler, told me some amusing incidents of visits to European museums. One day, being in the Louvre, he met at the door of the famous Salon Carré a party of tourists from Ohio whom he had met on the steamer coming over. They stopped in greeting, and my friend inquired as to how they liked the pictures in the Salon Carré. In a well-satisfied manner, as they would consent to the soup being quite right, and they did not want any more sugar in their tea, they replied: "Yes, there are some nice pictures there."

On a visit to the Berlin Gallery, he overheard a group of Berliner milliners, standing around an artist, who was copying the great Van Dyck, the pride of the Museum. The exclamation came: "Schön, wunderschön. Ach, das doch die Copien immer schöner sind als die Originale."

* * *

We contemplated the painting with unfeigned admiration.

"There is no longer that uncertainty in the artist's work!" we exclaimed.

"No," it was replied. "He has naturally acquired a bolder stroke through having no longer to paint battle-scenes with a view to their being available for gingham-patterns!"

Hence we were led to believe that a measure of material prosperity was not after all incompatible with some degree of genuine artistic worth.—*Detroit Journal.*

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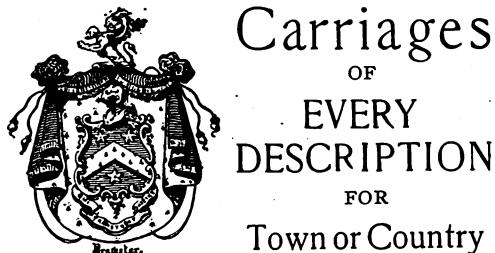
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One of the best analyses of Art principles was laid down by Charles Blanc in referring to the few simple underlying ideas which apply to all decoration, and which condense themselves in these thoughts: "Repetition, Alternation, Symmetry, Progression, and Confusion."

The truth of this analysis by the French artist-philosopher will in one way be recognized when he says: "Any form, however insignificant in itself, becomes interesting by repetition; at first, because the artist by repeating it forces us to take notice of it, and reveals an intention which would have escaped our observation without this repetition; and next, because number often suggests thoughts which unity would not have originated." When we reflect upon this principle, so simple and yet so full of meaning, we can easily see how in the ornament of a wall paper a row of daisies or bunches of flowers constantly repeated gives its own character to the room for which it serves as background, or how the little triangles or convolving or convoluting lines have their character of repose.

Like all transient fashions of dress, nothing changes its patterns or its colors more constantly than wall paper, and the artistic requirements of growing culture place an exacting demand on the inventive skill of the designers. Wall papers have a share in the comfort and pleasure of our daily life that pictures or ornaments scarcely can equal. Bruegel contributed to the artistic merit of the whole by painting the landscape background for many of Rubens' figure compositions—the artist who designs the wallground to our rooms, with tone and richness of color contributing to the effect of paintings, engravings and furniture, deserves equal praise.

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